

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 AID-05 TRSE-00 OMB-01 EB-08 DOE-12 SOE-01
COME-00 ACDA-12 HA-05 MCT-01 CAB-02 FAA-00 DOTE-00
/108 W

-----010563 241317Z /40

P R 232043Z DEC 77
FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5420
INFO AMEMBASSY CARACAS
USSOUTHCOM
AMCONSUL BARRANQUILLA POUCH
AMCONSUL CALI POUCH
AMCONSUL MEDELLIN POUCH

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, PGOV, PORS, MILI, ECON, CO
SUBJECT: THE WEEK IN COLOMBIA

1. SUMMARY. A STATEMENT BY MILITARY LEADERS OVER CRITICISM OF THE MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT CAUSED SOME CONCERN, BUT THERE WERE NO SIGNS OF ANY FURTHER MILITARY MOVES. THERE WAS CONTINUED PUBLIC ALARM OVER KIDNAPPINGS. PRESIDENT LOPEZ LAUDED THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF CONGRESS BUT DID LITTLE TO STEM CRITICISMS OF THAT INSTITUTION. THE HOLIDAY SEASON BROUGHT THE USUAL DECLINE IN POLITICAL ACTIVITY. BILATERAL TALKS ON JET FUEL PRICES WERE SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETED. CHARGES OF PROTECTIONISM AGAINST THE US PRECIPITATED A BREAK BETWEEN THE COLOMBO-AMERICAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AND THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF INDUSTRIES. END SUMMARY.

2. DECLARATION BY GENERALS: REACTIONS WERE UTED AND
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THERE WERE NO SIGNS OF ANY FURTHER MILITARY STEPS FOLLOWING THE DECEMBER 19 DECLARATION BY THE GENERALS WHICH AMONG OTHER THINGS, EXPRESSED CONCERN OVER CRITICISM OF THE MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT (BOGOTA

11907). IN PRIVATE CONVERSATIONS WITH EMBASSY OFFICERS, SOME GENERALS CLAIMED THEY INTENDED NO CHALLENGE TO PRESIDENT LOPEZ BUT BELIEVED THEY HAD TO GO ON THE RECORD TO PROTEST ATTACKS

ON INDIVIDUAL OFFICERS (DEFENSE MINISTER GENERAL VARON AND ARMED FORCES COMMANDER GENERAL CAMACHO) WHICH THEY FELT WEAKENED THE MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT. THEY SAID THAT PRESIDENT LOPEZ' REACTION TO THEIR PRESENTATION TO HIM ON DECEMBER 19 WAS CALM AND SYMPHETIC. IT IS LIKELY THAT LOPEZ WILL ADDRESS IN HIS NEW YEAR MESSAGE SOME OF THE ISSUES THE GENERALS RAISED, PARTICULARLY SINCE THEY ARE RELATED TO CONTINUING PROBLEMS OF INSECURITY AND CRIME (SEE NEXT ITEM).

3. PUBLIC ORDER: ALARM OVER THE KIDNAPPINGS OF PROMINENT OR WEALTHY PERSONS DOMINATED THE POLITICAL SCENE, AND PROMPTED PRESIDENT LOPEZ TO ANNOUNCE IN HIS SPEECH CLOSING CONGRESS THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A UNIFIED ORGANIZATION TO COORDINATE THE ACTIVITIES OF ALL SECURITY AGENCIES AGAINST INSECURITY. VARIOUS BUSINESS AND CIVIC GROUPS CALLED ON THE GOVERNMENT TO ADOPT STRENUOUS MEASURES TO COMBAT KIDNAPPINGS, TO WHICH THE PRESIDENT RESPONDED WITH A STATEMENT THAT THE GOVERNMENT WAS READY TO RECEIVE SUGGESTIONS ON ANTI-CRIME MEASURES WHICH WERE WITHIN THE LAW (BOGOTA 11907). THERE WAS A MARKED INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF MILITARY PATROLS IN BOGOTA, AS RUMLS OF NEW KIDNAPPINGS OR OF THE PENDING RELEASE OF VARIOUS VICTIMS KEPT PUBLIC ATTENTION FOCUSED ON THE INSECURITY ISSUE. THE MURDER DECEMBER 22 OF ONE VICTIM HELD SINCE EARLY DECEMBER INCREASED THE CONCERN FOR THE SAFETY OF ALL THE VICTIMS. OFFICIAL REPORTS INDICATE THAT 23 PERSONS ARE PRESENTLY KNOWN TO BE KIDNAPPED, 13 OF THEM IN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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BOGOTA. MEANWHILE, A PREVIOUSLY UNHEARD OF GROUP OF TUE-RILLAS, THE POPULAR FOFCES OF GUERRILLA ACTION (FPAG), ATTACKED A SMALL VILLAGE IN PUTUMAYO WHERE THEY LOOTED A NUMBER OF OFFICES AND STORES, AND ESCAPED AFTER REPORTEDLY KIDNAPPING SEVERAL YOUNG WOMEN. IN BOGOTA, LEAFLETS WERE DISTRIBUTED CLAIMING THAT THE NATIONAL LIBERATION ARMY (ELN) AND THE M-19 TERRORIST GROUP HAVE JOINED FORCES.

4. PRESIDENT PRAISES CONGRESS: PRESIDENT LOPEZ FORMALLY ENDED THE FOUR YEAR CONGRESSIONAL TERM WITH A SPEECH DECEMBER 16 BEFORE BOTH HOUSES OF CONGRESS. THE PRESIDENT STRONGLY DEFENDED THE LEGISLATIVE RECORD OF CONGRESS, AND NOTED THE POLITICAL SUPPORT WHICH A COALITION OF LIBERAL AND CONSERVATIVE CONGRESSIONAL SECTORS HAD GIVEN HIS ADMINISTRATION. HE DEPLORED THE LACK OF FUNCTIONAL LIBERAL PARTY LEADERSHIP IN CONGRESS, BUT IMPLICITLY PRAISED THE EFFORTS OF PRECANDIDATE JULIO CESAR TURBAY IN DEVELOPING THE LIBERAL/CONSERVATIVE COALITION WHICH MADE THE CONGRESSIONAL SESSION A SUCCESS. LOPEZ TERMED THE LIBERAL PRESS THE MOST HOSTILE AND UNJUST IN THE PAST 20 YEARS. THE SPEECH WAS DELIVERED TO A CHAMBER OF REPRESENTATIVES THAT LACKED A QUORUM (ITS NORMAL CONDITION) AND A SENATE WITH A BARE MAJORITY IN AT-

TENDANCE. DESPITE THE PRESIDENT'S ATTEMPT TO PUT THE CONGRESSIONAL SESSION IN A FAVORABLE LIGHT, POLITICAL COMMENTATORS CONTINUED TO VIEW THIS FOUR YEAR SESSION AS HAVING ACCOMPLISHED LITTLE TO RENEW PUBLIC FAITH IN THIS LEGISLATIVE INSTITUTION.

5. POLITICAL ACTIVITY DECLINES: WITH THE COMPLETION OF THE CONGRESSIONAL TERM OF OFFICE AND THE BEGINNING OF THE ANNUAL HOLIDAY EXODUS FROM BOGOTA, THERE WAS A SHARP DECLINE IN POLI-

TICAL ACTIVITY. FOR THE VAST MAJORITY OF POLITICIANS IT WAS VACATION TIME. MEANWHILE LIBERAL PARTY PRE-CANDIDATE, CARLOS LLERAS WAS FORCED TO REITERATE THAT HE WILL NOT BREAK THE PARTY'S SAN CARLOS AGREEMENT, AND THAT HE WILL SUPPORT WHO-LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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EVER WINS THE FEBRUARY ELECTIONS. HIS REMARKS WERE PROMPTED BY PRESS SPECULATION THAT HE MIGHT CAMPAIGN AS AN INDEPENDENT PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE IF HE LOSES THE FEBRUARY ELECTIONS. THE SPECULATION WAS GENERATED BY AN APPARENT MISINTERPRETATION OF A CAMPAIGN REMARK THAT HE WOULD LEAD A "HOST OF THE DEFEATED" IF THE FEBRUARY ELECTIONS WENT AGAINST HIM.

6. AGREEMENT REACHED ON AVIATION FUEL PRICES. FOLLOWING INTENSE NEGOTIATIONS, THE US AND COLOMBIA THIS WEEK REACHED AGREEMENT ON THE LONG STANDING PROBLEM OF THE PRICE OF JET FUEL FOR AMERICAN CARRIERS OPERATING IN COLOMBIA. THE AGREEMENT, WHICH REDUCES THE PRICE TO BRANIFF TO 45 CENTS A GALLON, IS BASED ON A FORMULA CALLING FOR A PRICE INCREASE TO THE COLOMBIAN AIRLINES COMBINED WITH AN ADVANCE DEPOSIT BY BRANIFF. WITH THE SOLUTION SEVERAL MONTHS AGO OF THE FUEL TAX QUESTION, ALL MAJOR BILATERAL CIVIL AVIATION PROBLEMS APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN RESOLVED.

7. CHARGES OF US PROTECTIONISM CREATE PUBLIC CONTROVERSY; THE CHARGES OF US PROTECTIONISM BY NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF INDUSTRIES (ANDI) PRESIDENT FABIO ECHEVERRO (BOGOTA 11725) DEVELOPED INTO A PUBLIC POLEMIC BETWEEN HIM AND THE COLOMBIAN-AMERICAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE WHICH LED TO ANDI'S PUBLIC WITHDRAWAL FROM THE CHAMBER. AFTER THE CHAMBER EXECUTIVE PRESIDENT REBUTTED THE ORIGINAL CHARGES, ECHEVERRI RESPONDED BY ALLEGING DISLOYALTY TO COLOMBIA BY THE CHAMBER BECAUSE IT NEGLECTED TO INFORM COLOMBIAN EXPORTERS OF GSP OPPORTUNITIES. ANOTHER, MORE ACRED, PUBLIC EXCHANGE OF CHARGES AND COUNTER-CHARGES PRECIPITATED THE SUDDEN BREAK IN RELATIONS WHICH THE NATIONAL PRESS HEADLINED. ECHEVERRI REPORTEDLY PICKED A FIGHT WITH THE CHAMBER AS PART OF HIS STRATEGY OF INCITING PUBLIC OPINION AGAINST "PROTECTIONISM" IN ORDER TO DRUM UP SUPPORT FOR GOC OFFICIALS IN IMPORTANT, UP-COMING TRADE NEGOTIATIONS SUCH AS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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THE BILATERAL TEXTILE AGREEMENT. WITH REGARD TO THE COLOMBIAN
UTILIZATION OF GSP, THE RATE WAS 83 PERCENT IN 1976 AND IT ROSE TO AN

ESTIMATED 95 PERCENT DURING THE FIRST HALF OF 1977.

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Message Attributes

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